
WITNESS



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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Salutations and greetings to you all! The year seems to be passing far too quickly, and we are merely 6 weeks away from the National Lay Preachers conference, which will be held on the 7th-10th of July. This conference promises to be educational, thought provoking, informative and inspirational. I hope to see many new, and familiar faces as we gather as the Lay Preacher community to celebrate and learn together.

At the most recent Lay Preacher Conference in March, Chris Barnett posed the question "What are your expectations in leading worship?" The answers were varied, but a common theme was "Assisting people to communicate with God", "Creating a worship space which is inclusive and inviting" and "Allowing people to worship in a way that is meaningful to them." I am sure that everyone in the room, could have given a unique perspective to this simple question.

After the conference, I reflected on not only this question, but its counter question, "What expectations do congregations have, when their worship is led by a Lay Preacher?" So I asked this question the following week, to the congregation I was leading. The responses were highly animated, and very enlightening. "We love the variety of messages that we receive from Lay Preachers." Another said, "We are often challenged by new thinking," and one of my favourite responses was "I love that we sing so many different hymns when the Lay Preachers' come."

As we all well know, leading worship, is far more than just presenting a well thought out sermon, and finding the right hymns. The upcoming National Conference has a wide variety of topics which focus on many

of the vitally important aspects of worship. While our speakers are highly knowledgeable, and will no doubt inspire us, an important part of any conference, is the sharing, and the shared experiences of the collective group. I am a great believer in the adage "Learning is not the product of teaching. Learning is the product of the activity of learners." - John Holt. The Committee of Management hope to see many of you at this exciting event.

THE PRESIDENT WRITES

The 2017 Conference/AGM was a great time for the many who attended. This year we did something new and shared some of the sessions with the Lay Preacher candidates whose weekend intensive occurred in parallel with our event. There were many positive conversations, with Lay Preachers of long service exchanging ideas with those just beginning to explore this most essential ministry. Both groups have much to learn from the other.

Our opening worship and the session which followed, led by Chris Barnett, used resources to support intergenerational worship, called 'Engage Together'. If you haven't tried this free resource before, do so now. Resources for the upcoming Pentecost season are at the link below. I'm confident that there is something there to suit every congregation and Lay Preacher. <http://www.ctmresourcing.org.au/engagetgether-intergenerational-worship-ideas-for~12338>> [Engage Together \(Pentecost Season\)](#)

Also at the conference we explored how to use silence appropriately and effectively with Christina Rowntree, and gained greater understanding of the history of the *Basis of Union* from D'Arcy Wood, which was most appropriate in this year of the

40th anniversary of the Uniting Church in Australia. Jenny Byrnes led us to consider which issues are worth great amounts of time and energy using the imagery of icebergs. Very interesting and thought provoking!

Our Association affirmed two new officers at our Annual General Meeting. After several years of looking after the finances, Rob Coulson has passed the ledger to Rob Lees, who was elected Treasurer. Heather Cowled has graciously accepted the position of general secretary from Alastair Davison who had been in the role on a short term basis. May we all support and encourage them as they serve in these important positions. We still need to fill Presbytery representative vacancies on the Committee of Management in Western Victoria and Tasmania and hope that these can be filled before too long.

The 'Keeping Children Safe' policy is having an impact on the Association as we need to update all of our documents to include the requirements of 'Keeping Children Safe'. It has not been a particularly clear transition to these new requirements and procedures, particularly for congregations, and work will continue into the future. We are encouraged though, at the response across the Synod of Lay Preachers, to obtaining the Working With Children Checks. All of us need to support Lay Preachers who may find it difficult to understand the need for mandatory Working With Children Checks, but at the same time convey to them that there can be no exceptions. All Lay Preachers must hold a WWCC, and it is our responsibility to make this clear to the Lay Preachers with whom we work.

Soon after the Conference I was pleased to attend a gathering of the Lay Preachers in the Presbytery of Tasmania. The group had some difficult issues to deal with, but throughout the activities of the day the desire to get together as a group to support each other in their ministries shone brightly. We wish them well in their working together in a new way.

The National Conference is coming up in less than six weeks as I write this. If your registration has yet to go in, I so urge you to get going and make a commitment to come. I look forward to meeting many of you there.

Peace be with you... **Lou Anne**

PRESBYTERY REPORTS

Gippsland

Peter Morris

When I meet Lay Preachers, I usually ask how they are going, how much preaching they are doing, and if they would like to be leading some more services. The general consensus is that we are glad of our ministry and doing about as much as we can handle.

As we consider many strategic changes in the life of the church, it is more important than ever that we encourage and take an interest in each other. Our encouraging words and prayer in support of each other's ministry are a vital part of our ministry as Lay Preachers.

Our Presbytery has been collecting the Working With Children Check details from all our Lay Preachers. This has been more difficult and time consuming than expected..

A calendar of educational opportunities in Gippsland for the remainder of the year has been created and will be circulated via our email/ mailing list.

We have much to be thankful for.

North East Victoria

Joan McRae

The Lay Preachers of North East Victoria did not meet for a study day in April as planned: it was decided to defer it until late in the year, on a date yet to be set. The focus will probably be Preaching in the Year of Mark. We are hoping Lay Preachers will be encouraged to attend the National Conference.

Meanwhile, our Lay Preachers continue their busy preaching schedules and other church-related activities. Two are on the

committee organising the National Conference. Two are on the planning committee for Wisdom's Feast, being hosted with the CTM at Yarrawonga in August. Nine Lay Preachers attended the most recent Conference, and two candidates continue with their preparation for Recognition as Lay Preachers.

Port Phillip East

Di Paterson

Port Phillip East has a 3 Lay Preacher Candidates who are working through the preaching assessment tasks. We also have 2 Lay Preachers who have done a period of discernment and are looking to candidate for ordained ministry. There are a number of Lay Preachers in our Presbytery who are involved regularly in taking services to support Churches who are unable to afford full time ministry. It was a great advantage to have Lay Preacher candidates training as part of the Conference weekend, enjoying the education sessions with the Lay Preachers then moving into training with Rohan. The 3 candidates from our Presbytery found it very helpful to be involved with the training and the intensives with Rohan. We are still working through the establishment of a Lay Preacher's group in PPEP.

Port Philip West

Rob Coulson

Mr Raymond Suriipal has been approved for accreditation as a Lay Preacher. A formal service of accreditation will be conducted shortly. PPW has agreed to sponsor 3 Lay Preachers to attend the National Conference. Lay Preachers and candidates who have not provided WWCC details by 30 June will have accreditation withdrawn.

Sadly one candidate has been refused WWCC. This candidate has been advised and removed from all LP listings

Tasmania- vacant due to restructuring .

Yarra Yarra

Hailey Rose

The Yarra Yarra Lay Preachers committee has been undertaking a review of our role. A survey was sent to all lay preachers on the role and parishes to update the role and indicate their frequency in taking services and continuing education. We received positive feedback on our request for how much study and how many services had been taken. Two people commented that study should be compulsory.

We have had approximately 50 responses, follow up is occurring with lay preachers who have not returned their survey. The survey has elicited 4 retirements. We are also aware of service certificates being required - three for 60 years, four for 50 years and two for 25 years. We have become aware of a small number of lay preachers that were not on our role.

We have 7 candidates for lay preacher who are being supported by mentors as they continue with their studies and assessed services. Information for the National Lay Preachers conference has been distributed to all lay preachers with the next Yarra Yarra continuing education session planned for October when Lou-Anne will join us.

Education Opportunities Rohan Pryor

Synod transition from CTM to Mission & Capacity Building Unit (working title)

Implementation of the Synod 2016 meeting decisions on Synod structures, in particular the transition from the CTM, CFM, Placements Committee and BOMAR into the new structure currently called the Mission & Capacity Building Unit, continues to progress slowly. Appointment of a new Executive Officer to head the unit is currently underway. Current staff members are continuing to serve in anticipation of key functions continuing into the future in some way or another.

Assembly Standards for Formation and Education for Lay Preachers

Some comments on the implementation of Lay Preacher Standards:

Despite a continuing commitment to good quality leadership in worship and preaching, there is a little 'pushback' in relation to the level of detail in the new Competencies for Lay Preachers, and the standards expected of Lay Preacher candidates. (This is paralleled by the increasing regulatory compliance requirements for active Lay Preachers; each are seen as daunting and excessive 'hurdles' to lay people leading worship, and an impediment to people exercising the specified ministry of Lay Preacher). Work in ongoing in this area to meet the requirements of both the Church and Lay Preachers.

Education options for Lay Preacher Candidates 2017

During this transitional time, four training weekends are being offered with a specific focus on the two Core Competencies and the General Competencies related to Worship and Preaching (the competencies are the same for the Ministry of Pastor). The dates of the four intensive weekends are: 24-26 Mar (aligned with the LPA AGM)

19-21 May

25-27 August (new/adjusted date)

13-15 October (new/adjusted date)

Planning for the education options for 2018 are at best tentative, given the structural changes ahead. The Synod of NSW.ACT has continued to develop their program of four courses commonly offered as pairs of intensive weekends, and these now align with the new standards. The previous courses offered by Trinity College Queensland could be made available through the *Uniting Learning* project of the national Assembly's Formation, Education and Discipleship Working Group; current changes in Assembly staffing and priorities naturally have some effect; the blended

online & distance education courses would also need a network to update, conduct and develop them further.

How the training for Lay Preachers will be further adapted to meet the strategic priorities of the Synod, and the growing need for recognised leaders such as Lay Preachers and local office holders to engage beyond the gathered congregations of faithful worshippers, pose significant challenges ahead. As with much of the life of the Church, faithful discipleship and community will require transformation as well as tradition.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF LAY PREACHERS

CENTRE FOR THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY, JULY 7 to 10, 2017

Next month's National Conference of Lay Preachers is the fifth in the series held by the National Lay Preachers' Committee, and hosted by synod Lay Preachers' groups - Queensland, New South Wales/ACT, South Australia, West Australia - and finally Victoria and Tasmania, the order being determined by the venue for the next year's Assembly meeting.

The committee were delighted to be able to advise Lay Preachers and other interested people in this Synod and round Australia of the final details of the conference programme. An interesting and stimulating programme has been arranged and outstanding presenters have been engaged to ensure that our sessions are rich times of learning and sharing.

At present we have about one-third the number of registrations we need to make this a really successful conference, so the committee urges Lay Preachers, Candidates, worship leaders and their friends from this Synod to register now. It is possible to attend for less than the complete conference. Choose the day or days which interest you most and register for them.

Members of the Committee of Management are also asked to encourage people from their presbytery to attend some or all of the conference. We have registrations from Perth, and one from Thursday Island, but we need many more registrations from this Synod!

All the information is now on the CTM website and may be readily accessed.

A lively, stimulating, interesting programme has been arranged, allowing plenty of opportunity for fellowship and sharing, especially with people from other Synods.

Our Bible studies will be led by Dr Sunny Chen, on Saturday morning. On Sunday we have the opportunity to learn more about Jesus and his day, in the fascinating presentations of Jewish scholar Dr Paul Forgasz, an expert in first century Judaism. On Monday we will reflect on our faith with Dr Jenny Byrnes. Friday night's session, *Reformation 500 - and us* will be led by a panel who will help us explore the significance of the Reformation then and now: Pr Gordon Wegener, Lutheran, Fr Denis Stanley, Catholic and Dr D'Arcy Wood will offer their insights and help us prepare for the anniversary on October 31. Worship? Of course! Workshops? Saturday afternoon is the time to change pace and choose between Public Prayer, Singing the Psalms, Messy Church, The Art of Prayer Through Art (using icons), Intergenerational Ministry, Singing New Hymns. Saturday and Sunday evening sessions will be more relaxing, as we are led by Chris Meneilly, and Avril Hannah Jones. There's also some free time Sunday afternoon before the national meeting of Lay Preachers, to be led by NLPC President, Max Howland.

Naturally you want to share in this weekend feast! We hope you can attend the whole conference, but if not, come for some of it. And bring your friends - it's not just for Lay Preachers, but for all who lead worship or who would like to come. So far we have registrations from 21 people from Tasmania and Victoria: we would welcome more registrations. Come to meet people from interstate, including Thursday Island! Accommodation is still available.

If you need some financial assistance, ask your congregation or presbytery! Or you could apply for a Grant for Lay Education from the CTM:

<http://ctm.uca.edu.au/resources/funding-scholarships/> which includes guidelines and an application form.

For registrations and enquiries:
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Joan McRae, for the planning committee

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